



The Third Congress of the Federation of Caribbean Associations of Architects examined the issues of “The Impact of Tourism on Architecture and Vice/Versa.”

Over Thursday and Friday, June 15 and 16, multiple speakers, in multiple languages took the podium at the Renaissance Convention Center to address over one hundred delegates of the FCAA, and architectural students from the local schools that had been invited to join them. A number of topics pertinent to the economic development of the Caribbean nations that were represented in Aruba were of presented, and the question and answer periods after were particularly lively and stimulating, according to those attending.

This year’s theme “The Impact of Tourism on Architecture and Vice/Versa,” was of great import to the delegates because, in the words of FCAA President Jack Sainsily of Guadeloupe, “Tourism is the foundation of the economies of the Caribbean islands.” Indeed, the speakers hailed from various countries, Costa Rica, Aruba, The Netherlands Antilles, the U.S.A. and Dominican Republic, and presented the views of not only the architects, but the developers who pay the bills, in the factors that decide the various directions that designing for tourism can be taken.

Aruba’s Minister of Education, Social Affairs, and Infrastructure, Ms. Marisol Lopez-Tromp opened the congress on Thursday with a challenge to the gathering. Her remarks expressed a criticism of the loss of the island’s cultural identity in that presently the design of hotels reflect the style of traditional resort areas such as Miami Beach, Cancun, or the French Riviera. She forwarded the opinion that the congress’ theme was quite appropriate and very evident on Aruba, and that the architectural identity that Aruba had “has faded away over the years.” Minister Lopez-Tromp also stated that a new board made up of local architects and engineers has been formed to review projects originating from abroad to see that the designs are more harmonious with the environment and would incorporate more aspects of the local culture.

Thursday’s Keynote Speakers was to be developer Jacob Gelt Dekker, of Kura Hulanda in Curacao, but he was delayed in Africa, so was represented by his chief architect Leo Helms. A PowerPoint presentation traced the early history of Eco-tourism from the days when Cornelius Harris began the first African Safaris in 1836. The virtual tour presented the various sorts of accommodations that this kind of tourism has evoked, from simple to luxurious, as a perfect example of the small “boutique” resort, which is the model for Kura Hulanda. This growing branch of tourism makes demands on the host countries to preserve their environment and wildlife, and is becoming ever more popular. The requirements of Eco-tourism also results in the design of resorts that are vastly different from those aimed at mass tourism, which must accommodate large numbers. According to Eduardo de Veer, CEO of META Corp, the owners of the Renaissance in Aruba and who spoke on Thursday afternoon, the economic structure of a “boutique” resort usually must be owner operated to be successful. The cost of running a resort such as the Renaissance, with a costly management team a necessity, will always result in the need to accommodate as many as possible to make the resort a financially viable investment.

Thursday’s sessions finished with a presentation by Chien Chung (C.C.) Pei, of Pei Partnership Architects, one of the world’s top designing firms. Mr. Pei is the son of the famous I.M. Pei, and a contributor to the design of the Pyramid at the Louvre, in Paris. After a photo presentation of the firm’s more famous projects, such as the Bank of China in Beijing, and an examination of design techniques, he discussed the impact of architecture on resort areas, an issue his firm is facing for the first time. They currently have five projects in Panama in development, and so are only this year delving into facing this issue. He was very happy that he had been invited to the congress because he had “learned so much.” Later, in private, he expressed that architects are “problem solvers,” but it is not in the best interest of the client to reproduce only what the client states that he wants, but to “enlighten.” He felt that the Minister’s challenge is an excellent point of departure in design, but architects should not be expected to simply copy existing structures.

Friday’s morning’s speakers included Earon Matthew, a native-born Aruban architect, and graduate of the Delft University, who is considered an icon in the industry. In additional was Robert Coleman, of the U.S.A. who specializes in organizing large projects, and who is now working on the timeshare resorts being built by Starwood in the Palm Beach area of Aruba.

In the afternoon John Diebbol, a lead designer and head of the New York firm of Michael Graves and Associates, considered one of the foremost architectural firms, worldwide, addressed the gathering. This award-winning firm, designers of the Trump International Tower in Ft. Lauderdale, is particularly noted for their innovative designs of libraries and museums. Mr. Diebbol expressed that designing such projects, which involve the design team with, and contribute to the community are his favorite projects, as it is an

obligation of architects to support the needs of the populace, and to incorporate their input in creating centers for learning.

The Third FCAA congress offered delegates an opportunity to truly experience the island life of Aruba as the chief organizers of the event, architect Orlando Hoeverts and ADIAA President Leo Ponson graciously received them in Orlando's home with his wife Esther at his side for a farewell party. The delegates saw how the design of a house could truly take advantage of the island's beautiful climate, making the open patio a center for home life. It not only displayed a charming example of how best to enjoy the Caribbean lifestyle, but also provided a relaxed atmosphere as opposed to a formal event in a hired hall, and was conducive to animated discussion and the forming of friendly alliances. All agreed, combined with a meal of authentic Aruban dishes such as Keshi Yena from Gourmet Catering, served by students from the EPI Hospitality Management school, it truly opened a window on to this island's life, and was a delightful way to end the congress.